TOXICOLOGY—THE BASIC SCIENCE OF POISONS. Edited Louis J. Casarett and John Doull. (Pp. 768; figures 15. £14.50). London: Bailliere Tindall. 1975.

THIS is a weighty and heavily documented textbook which should prove of great value to experimental toxicologists. It is arranged in four sections, each section consisting of a number of chapters reviewing the literature on a single aspect of toxicology. There are 35 contributors. The first section of 150 pages is concerned with general principles of toxicology, the absorption, metabolism and excretion of toxins, and the way in which these influence the dose response relationship. This rather detailed treatment is probably not appropriate for medical readers who would be better served by consulting medical textbooks of pharmacology and biochemistry. However, it should be valuable to non-medical toxicologists. In the next two sections occupying 400 pages, the current experimental toxicological field is reviewed in two ways. First by going through the systems of the body (central nervous system, liver, kidney, etc.) and second by going through all the groups of toxins (teratogens, carcinogens, pesticides, metals, etc.). Consequently, there is an almost complete duplication of information in these two sections. This is made worse by a duplication of coverage between say the section on carcinogens which deals with metals and the section on metals which deals with carcinogenesis. This duplication of coverage, coupled with the emphasis on information derived from animal experiments and neglect of clinical information, reduces the value of the book to medical readers.

The final section is concerned with the organisation and work load of units concerned with such specialist fields as "clinical toxicology", "forensic toxicology", "veterinary toxicology" and so on and again contains little of value to the medical reader.

Out of this mass of carefully documented information, I gleaned two often repeated messages:—

1. that in almost all the fields the animal data shows such species variation that it is difficult to apply to man.

2. that there is an urgent need to collect accurate quantitative information in humans. Several writers refer to the conflicting advice about treatment in the medical literature. But without proper documentation of initial tissue or blood levels, etc., claims for successful treatment are valueless.

P.C.E.

VIRAL DISEASES: A SYMPOSIUM. Edited by A. T. Proudfoot. (Pp. 134. £2.40). Edinburgh: Royal College of Physicians. 1975.

ALL the contributors to the symposium which is reported in the book are recognised authorities on the subject with which they deal. Hence the accounts are reliable, up-to-date, useful and sometimes entertaining. The articles vary in length and content, those on rubella and bronchitis being of most direct clinical interest, that on influenza covering most aspects of the disease and that on measles and multiple sclerosis most terse and properly non-committal. The epidemiologists score heavily in presenting the human situation; many senior medical students will wish that their teaching was as good as this. Thus the bag is mixed and the editor has provided no foreword to indicate the purpose of the symposium. Present-day understanding of some common virus diseases would be a suitable sub-title.

K.F.